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ISOLATION AND THE WILL:

A STUDY OF HERMAN MELVILLE'S ISOLATOES

by



MARCO PIETRO LO VERSO

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and  
recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance,  
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## ABSTRACT

The thesis concentrates on Herman Melville's "isolatoes" and on the relationship between their sense of connection to the human community and their ability to perform acts of will.

In Chapter 27 of Moby-Dick, Melville refers to the isolatoes as those individuals who do not acknowledge "the common continent of men, but each Isolato living on a separate continent of his own." As a result of this isolation, all of the isolatoes are spiritually weak because they are incapable of seeing the full extent of human responsibilities. Consequently, their wills can only function within the limits of their restricted vision. But the individual isolatoes differ from one another in their degree of isolation from the common continent of men. Some are more aware of human responsibilities and are more capable of making acts of will, while others are less aware of their humanity and thus less able to act as men.

Chapter II defines Melville's concept of the genuine man, i.e., the man who is in touch with his humanity and is therefore aware of his responsibilities as a human being. Melville's main examples of this type are Babbalanja and Ishmael, both of whom are complete as men because they are able to love their fellow man and they have the strength to search for truth. They are balanced individuals because they have developed both their heart and their intellect.

Melville's isolatoes do not measure up to the standard of



the balanced individual: first, because they lack the strength to search for truth, and, more importantly, because their feelings of human brotherhood have been weakened or lost. Chapters III-V consider Melville's isolatoes with the latter point in mind, stressing at the same time the relationship between the isolato's weakened heart and his weakened will. As we move from those who are more capable of feeling human love to those who have lost this capacity, we can also notice a decrease in the individual's ability to make acts of will. At the top of the isolato scale (the men of faith and the men of complacent geniality) the characters have a greater capacity for love and for feelings of human community. They reflect this capacity in their ability to create spiritual or social truths which protect their sense of security. The defeated individuals (Chapter IV) are examples of how man can lose his ability to love. Their greater spiritual isolation results in a suicidal state of mind which limits their will to a negation of human action. And the last type to be considered is the object man. Because of his complete spiritual death, he is incapable of any significant act of will, and he is characterized as an object or a tool in the hands of others.



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## CHAPTER I

This study undertakes to analyze a particular aspect of the problem of isolation in some of Herman Melville's prose works. Melville's treatment of isolation is a large topic and has already been well dealt with in much of Melville scholarship. However, critics have, for the most part, chosen to view isolation in Melville more from the point of view of the "quester" or defier, i.e., considering characters such as Taji, Pierre, and, most notably, Ahab.<sup>1</sup> Such characters are generally described as very strong-willed individuals who are basically dissatisfied with the common lot of man; as a result, they tend to dedicate their lives to very self-centered quests for absolutes. Ever since William Braswell's article in 1937 on Melville as a critic of Emerson,<sup>2</sup> much work has been done comparing this character type, especially Ahab, to Emerson's self-reliant individual.<sup>3</sup> Such discussions have often led critics to conclude that the quester's isolation is in effect a denial of his own manhood or a breaking away from what Hawthorne called the "magnetic chain of humanity."<sup>4</sup> But this sort of isolation is not limited to Melville's quester characters. As Milton R. Stern has already pointed out,<sup>5</sup> there are basically two types of isolated characters in Melville's works. Besides the quester, there is also the figure which Melville himself referred to as the "isolato" (MD, 108).<sup>6</sup>

The isolato differs from the quester in many ways; however,



the two are very close in the kind of isolation they achieve. The main difference between them is in the means by which they arrive at their respective states of isolation. This difference can be defined in terms of the difference in the function of the will for each character. The quester is driven on by a powerful will which is not satisfied unless it is constantly striving for an absolute, be it good or evil. His will thus attempts to transcend human limitations, as in the case of Ahab, by forcing "itself against gods and devils into a kind of self-assumed, independent being of its own" (MD, 175). Thus, the individual is imprisoned within himself and he becomes self-destructive in his solitary defiance. As Ishmael puts it, "he whose intense thinking thus makes him a Prometheus; a vulture feeds upon that heart for ever, that vulture the very creature he creates" (MD, 175). The quester's tragedy is thus brought on by an inner unbalance in which the will has taken complete control of "the eternal, living principle or soul" (MD, 175) in the individual. According to F. O. Matthiessen, Ahab "is an embodiment of his author's most profound response to the problem of the free individual will in extremis."<sup>7</sup> And as a result of this freedom of will, Matthiessen goes on to argue, Ahab "can see nothing but his own burning thoughts since he no longer shares in any normal fellow-feelings."<sup>8</sup> Ironically, then, it is the quester's exercise of an extreme freedom of will which is basically responsible for his self-imprisonment and his isolation from his fellow man.

Melville's isolatoes do not share this exercise of will. In



fact, it can be argued that if the quester, as exemplified by Ahab, is characterized by a "free individual will," the isolato suffers from a weak and shackled will. And it is as a result of this shackled will that the isolato is also cut off from the "magnetic chain of humanity" (or "the common continent of men," to use Melville's own terms), not because he attempts to transcend human limitations as Ahab does, but because he fails to live up to the minimum of human possibilities. In other words, if human possibilities and limitations are contained within the terrestrial boundaries of a continent (as Melville's geographical metaphor suggests), then it follows that anything beyond those boundaries dwells in the isolation of the sea. And it really makes no difference if one launches into this isolation from the north or the south shore; the loss of contact with the land is always there. I am not trying to suggest here that the quester and the isolato are total equals. There is an enormous difference, for example, between Ahab's heroic (even though mad) attack on Moby Dick and Bartleby's refusal to participate in life. For even though Ahab is driven to an extreme by his monomania, we can not help but admire him at times for using his resources to their fullest potential, whereas Bartleby can only be pitied for failing to see any purpose in human endeavors. The point is that although the former tries to outdo his humanity and the latter ultimately refuses to exercise even a minimum amount of his humanity; they share a similar spiritual isolation in that they are both cut off from the common continent of men. The reason for this is that both characters are out of touch with the





reality of what it means to be a human being, and, as a result, both lack an awareness of the spiritual responsibilities which all men who are not isolated hold in common. Ahab lacks this awareness because he has become the victim of his own untempered will. Bartleby suffers from a similar blindness because, in being incapable of shifting the focus of his existence from dead wall reveries, he has frozen his will into a never-changing decision to prefer not to live.

With Ahab and Bartleby we have two of the will's possibilities -- the "free individual will" and the shackled individual will. Admittedly, Ahab is also shackled in a way because his will leads him to a fatalistic self-imprisonment as the "Fates' lieutenant;" but this aligning of himself with the superhuman powers is in itself an indication of his own faith in himself and in his ability to challenge the realm of the gods. By common men this faith of Ahab's is called madness. Even Ahab is said to admit in his heart that although his means are sane, his motive and his object are mad (MD, 161). But it is this very madness which unleashes his powerful will because it is as a result of his faith that he sees no human limits to his potential. Thus, Ahab's will is allowed to range within the boundless realm of his madness. Bartleby, on the other hand, is a nihilist; he does not seem to believe in the validity of human action, and, as a result, his will can only function within the narrow limits of a denial of life. Put in general terms, the point being made is that the limits of one's desires (the limits within which one's will can function) are established by the limits of one's beliefs. And,





as I have suggested above, the individual's beliefs and his awareness of human spiritual responsibilities are conditioned by the extent to which he feels united to the common continent of men (or the "mutual joint-stock world," as Ishmael also calls it -- MD, 61). It is thus to the isolato's sense of connection to the human community that we must turn if we wish to understand why his spiritual awareness is limited and why his will is weak and shackled.

My central purpose in this study, then, is to show that there is a direct relationship between the isolato's feelings of human brotherhood and the extent to which he is able to exert his individual will. In determining this, I will follow the scale of isolato characters which Melville presents in Moby-Dick and The Piazza Tales. In Moby-Dick particularly Melville sets up his isolatoes in such a way that their relative juniority from the first mate down is marked by a corresponding decrease in spiritual awareness as well as a decrease in will power. The Piazza Tales offer examples which correspond to those in Moby-Dick as well as presenting a new character type with Benito Cereno and Bartleby. For purposes of simplicity, this scale of characters can be divided into four categories, in order of decreasing connection with the land and with humanity: 1) the character of faith, 2) the character of complacent geniality, 3) the defeated character, and 4) the object character. In the first two categories we find individuals who respond to evil by relying on a religious faith or by relying on a genial attitude which allows them to justify the existence of evil. Both of these types are able to make use of



their wills in so far as they can create spiritual or mental explanations for what they find unpleasant in life. The defeated character is incapable of producing such explanations. He allows the knowledge of evil to totally blacken his vision of life; and, as a result, he chooses to stop living. Thus, his will's function is limited to a denial of his own existence. In the fourth category, the will loses even this small amount of freedom because the object character's spirit is totally dead. Consequently, he can make no decisions, and his only usefulness is as a slave or a tool, i.e., an object. In all of these categories Melville emphasizes the individual's separation from his humanity by making use of imagery which suggests death or which places him at the sub-human level of animals, vegetables, or things. This use of imagery is particularly noticeable with the object characters, who actually become objects when they merge into the common identity of Ahab's ship.



## CHAPTER II

Before moving on to specific assessments of isolated characters, it is necessary to establish just what it is that Melville meant by an awareness of human spiritual responsibilities. That is, what standard does Melville establish which can be equated with what he calls "the common continent of men" and with which we can contrast the less than human actions of the isolatoes? I mentioned before that the relative freedom of the individual's will is conditioned by the spiritual framework within which he governs his life. And I suggested that this spiritual framework can be defined in terms of the limits of one's beliefs or disbeliefs. Ahab enjoys a "free" will because his mad faith in himself allows him a very wide range of powers (at least to his mind); Bartleby's nihilism, on the other hand, limits his will to a constant denial of life. To a large extent, then, the problem of establishing a standard of spiritual awareness can be solved by defining Melville's concept of epistemology.

Although Melville was intrigued throughout most of his career with the problem of man's ability to know eternal or absolute truth, his works show that he was in fact consistently skeptical of man's ability to attain this goal. In Mardi, for example, the philosopher Babbalanja defines for himself the same quest which will rouse Ahab and Pierre to action:





I am intent upon the essence of things; the mystery that lieth beyond; the elements of the tear which much laughter provoketh; that which is beneath the seeming; the precious pearl within the shaggy oyster. I probe the circle's center; I seek to evolve the inscrutable.

(Mardi, 305)<sup>1</sup>

This quest is noble, but, as the novel shows, Babbalanja is incapable of carrying it through successfully. In all of his searchings to fathom the inscrutable, Babbalanja is constantly foiled, and he is forced to admit that man himself is "harder to solve, than the Integral Calculus" (Mardi, 378). Everything in life is a mystery so that the philosophical quester is torn between the desire to solve this mystery and the realization that the solution is beyond his human grasp. And he begins to see that if he continues in this quest, the result will be a gradual self-destruction:

Oh! that I were another sort of fool than I am, that I might restore my good opinion of myself. Continually I stand in the pillory, am broken on the wheel, and dragged asunder by wild horses. Yes, yes, Bardianna, all is in a nut, as thou sayest; but all my back teeth can not crack it; I but crack my own jaws. All round me, my fellow men are new-grafting their vines, and dwelling in flourishing arbors; while I am forever pruning mine, till it is but a stump. Yet in this pruning will I persist; I will not add, I will diminish; I will train myself down to the standard of what is unchangeably true. Day by day I drop off my redundancies; ere long I shall have stripped my ribs; when I die, they will but bury my spine. Ah! where, where, where, my lord, is the everlasting Tekana? Tell me, Mohi, where the Ephina? I may have come to the Penultimate, but where, sweet Yoomy, is the Ultimate? Ah, companions! I faint, I am wordless: -- something, -- nothing, -- riddles, -- does Mardi hold her?

(Mardi, 339)





In the garden metaphor above we have a suggestion of the basic difference between the average non-isolated man and the quester. The former is a sustainer of life; he cuts away dead matter, but he also grafts new vines, and, as a result, he produces "flourishing arbors." The latter is a destroyer who prunes away the living vines and even strips his own humanity down to the bone in an effort to discover The "Ultimate" Truth. But since this truth is beyond his mind's grasp, he only succeeds in creating death. In effect, he is guilty of Hawthorne's "unpardonable sin."<sup>2</sup> Driven on by his monomaniac desire for The Truth and by his own proud faith in his abilities to achieve this goal, the quester is in danger of ignoring his heart and allowing his intellect to dominate his existence. However, unlike Taji, Ahab, and Pierre, Babbalanja is able to see this tendency before it is too late. And significantly enough, he is cured of his monomania after landing on Serenia, "the land of Love" (Mardi, 552). Reconsidering Alma's (Christ's) original teachings as they are explained to him by the Old Man on the island, Babbalanja realizes that Alma's doctrine of love is valid for man because it appeals to a basic "instinct" in his soul. Thus, to love involves no contradiction in man's nature. "Right-reason, and Alma, are the same;" argues the Old Man, "else Alma, not reason, would we reject. The Master's great command is Love; and here do all things wise, and all things good unite. Love is all in all. The more we love, the more we know; and so reversed. Oro we love; this isle; and our wide arms embrace all Mardi like its reef" (Mardi, 558). In other words, man can become closer to Oro (God) and thus



gain wisdom, but this can only be done by uniting oneself in love with Oro and not by attempting to understand Him through reason alone. Thus, Melville suggests that the genuine human being (he who is part of the common continent of men) is one who maintains a proper balance between mind and heart. Throughout the novel, Babbalanja is driven by a monomaniac intellectual quest. But following his discussion with the Old Man on Serenia, he achieves this new inner balance: as a result of Alma's teachings, he has learned not to "think" of those things which man is incapable of knowing, and he rests content "with knowing naught but Love" (Mardi, 561). That is to say, his heart has regained its proper importance within him, and his "reason no longer domineers; but still doth speak" (Mardi, 559).

It is the absence of this inner balance which characterizes the tragedy of Melville's unsaved questers. Driven on by unfettered wills, they lose sight of the importance of love. As a result, they reject their fellow man, and they become the self-imprisoned victims of quests which (to their minds) are ultimately governed by superhuman powers such as fate. For example, Taji is not satisfied with the lesson of love that Babbalanja learns, and, "fixed as Fate" (Mardi, 566), he becomes his "own soul's emperor" and abdicates humanity in his pursuit of Yillah through the "realm of shades" (Mardi, 580). Similarly, Ahab rejects the human love offered to him by Pip (Chapter 129) and Starbuck (Chapter 132), convinced that he is the windlass and Fate is the handspike which turns him in his chase. And "Fixed Fate" wins hegemony over "Free Will" in *Pierre*,<sup>3</sup> who turns away from



Lucy's earthly love in order to pursue the dark Isabel and the truth she seems to represent. The central problem with these tragic questers is that their inner unbalance has resulted in an unbalanced vision of life, which permits them to see only the evil and sorrowful and not the good and the joyful. And Melville's belief is that man should have the capacity for seeing both without becoming the victim of either. "That mortal man who hath more of joy than sorrow in him, that mortal man cannot be true -- not true, or undeveloped," says Ishmael. But, he continues, quoting Solomon, "'the man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain' (i.e. even while living) 'in the congregation of the dead.' Give not thyself up, then, to fire, lest it invert thee, deaden thee; as for the time it did me. There is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness" (MD, 355). And this is precisely the madness of Melville's questers. Ahab, for example, believes that "both the ancestry and posterity of Grief go further than the ancestry and posterity of Joy" (MD, 385). Thus, his vision of life is dominated by his desire to know evil -- the "dark Hindoo half of nature." And the "darker faith" (MD, 409) which this inspires in him leads him to prefer to seek out evil rather than sharing goodness and love with his wife and child, with Pip, with Starbuck, and with humanity in general. His incapacity to love reflects his preoccupation with evil and with the darkness that it brings. "The man oppressed with cares, he cannot love; the man of gloom finds not the god," says the narrator of Pierre. "Love may end in grief and age, and pain and need, and all other modes of human mournfulness; but love begins in joy" (Pierre, 44).





This lesson of joy and of love is the first step which must be taken for a fruitful life. The ability to love is the principal sign of the balanced individual. As we saw, Babbalanja learns this lesson at the end of Mardi, and it is as a result of his discovery of love that he is able to conclude that his voyage has ended -- "Not because what we sought is found; but that I now possess all which may be had of what I sought in Mardi" (Mardi, 565). It is important to note that Babbalanja is able to appreciate the lesson of love because he has become aware of the limits of the human intellect. Babbalanja had been exposed to Alma's teachings before, but it is only after he has explored his mind and the world that he is able to see the value of love. The same is also true of Ishmael in Moby Dick. Ishmael is also a quester,<sup>4</sup> and, like the other questers, he is likewise "tormented with an everlasting itch for things remote" (MD, 16). However, Ishmael differs from the other questers discussed in that he appears to have a greater awareness of his epistemological limitations from the very beginning of the novel. As a result, he seems to have few aspirations for knowing the Ultimate Truth, and he can admit that the ocean represents for him "the ungraspable phantom of life" (MD, 14). Thus, he goes to sea because, as he states in the first paragraph of "Loomings," it is his method "of driving off the spleen, and regulating the circulation" (MD, 12). In other words, he plans to leave the land temporarily so as to arrive at an inner balance. However, Ishmael is also, like Ahab, intrigued by the "grand hooded phantom" (MD, 16), Moby Dick. And although he admits that the pursuit "of that demon





phantom that, some time or other, swims before all human hearts . . . [can only] lead us on in barren mazes or midway leave uswhelmed" (MD, 204), he is nonetheless driven to participate in Ahab's quest for the White Whale:

I, Ishmael, was one of that crew; my shouts had gone up with the rest; my oath had been welded with theirs; and stronger I shouted, and more did I hammer and clench my oath, because of the dread in my soul. A wild, mystical, sympathetical feeling was in me; Ahab's quenchless feud seemed mine.

(MD, 155)

But the "dread" in Ishmael's soul indicates that he does not completely share Ahab's vision. And he admits that Ahab's "quenchless" (and therefore futile) feud only "seemed" his;<sup>5</sup> however, he still contributes to the pursuit for the whale till the very end. Thus, although Ishmael seems to be aware of his human limitations from the beginning, there is still something in him which yearns for absolutes. This is why Ishmael shows such great respect for Bulkington in the early part of the novel. Bulkington represents man's commitment to "earnest thinking [, which] is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea; while the wildest winds of heaven and earth conspire to cast her on the treacherous, slavish shore" (MD, 97). But Ishmael fails to realize that Bulkington carries this "earnest thinking" too far. It is true, as Ishmael says, that "in landlessness alone resides the highest truth, shoreless, indefinite as God," but it is also true that the shore offers us "all that's kind to our mortalities" (MD, 97). And since Ishmael himself had established earlier



that the highest truth is an "ungraspable phantom," his present praise of Bulkington's almost complete landlessness is not consistent with his earlier beliefs. Had he remembered his previous statement, he would have realized that Bulkington has in fact cut himself off from humanity and has become, like Taji, "the hunter, that never rests! the hunter without a home" (Mardi, 567). Apparently, Ishmael has yet to test some of his ideas in the physical world. For in the same way that Ishmael the teacher advances from the abstract cetological knowledge of the "extracts" to the concrete on-the-spot observations of the whaler at sea, Ishmael the philosophical quester must advance from his generalizations on life to confirmation of these generalizations through actual experience.<sup>6</sup> It is only after he has tested his human limitations that he is able to state that "doubts of all things earthly, and intuitions of some things heavenly; this combination makes neither believer nor infidel, but makes a man who regards them both with equal eye" (MD, 314). But at this point in the novel Ishmael has not yet fully tested his theories on man's epistemological limits. Like Babbalanja before he arrives at Serenia, Ishmael would still like to believe that the ultimate truth is perhaps within man's reach. His praise of Bulkington and his allegiance to Ahab's quest reflect this hopeful belief. And it is for this reason that Ishmael signs on with the Pequod even after having learned the lesson of fraternal love from Queequeg almost at the very outset of the novel.

Had Ishmael's problem been strictly limited to a weakness of the heart, the novel would have ended for him at "A Bosom Friend."



For it is at that chapter that Ishmael's attraction to Queequeg affects his "splintered heart and maddened hand" so that they are no longer turned against "the wolfish world" (MD, 53). But the lesson of love is only the first step and, like Babbalanja, Ishmael must explore his human limitations before he can learn to fully appreciate the meaning of human love. However, it is significant that Ishmael's first important experience in the novel is his almost "matrimonial" coupling with Queequeg; for, without it, his sea voyage would have remained merely his "substitute for pistol and ball" (MD, 12). This initial excuse for leaving the land is lost once Ishmael meets Queequeg, and his quest becomes a more metaphysical one, one which can be at least partially aligned with the lives of Bulkington and Ahab. Moreover, Queequeg's love for Ishmael re-establishes Ishmael's ties with humanity, and it is because of these ties that Ishmael's metaphysical quest never becomes an egotistical monomania. Throughout the novel, Ishmael's discoveries reflect a social awareness, and they are presented in terms of mankind rather than in strictly personal terms. Even as narrator, Ishmael is constantly conscious of his reader, whereas Taji's narration in Mardi emphasizes the "I" and the subjective experience. And with some of his more important discoveries, Ishmael emphasizes the relationship between his ties with humanity and his learning process by making his friend Queequeg an integral part of this process. In "The Mat-Maker," for instance, Ishmael sees "Queequeg's impulsive, indifferent sword" as the symbol of chance; and he himself is the shuttle or free will which can produce only a "crosswise





interblending" of its threads with the "fixed threads" of necessity (MD, 185). Thus the two friends become a living illustration of the relationship between the three forces which affect men's lives. Similarly, Ishmael's monkey-rope connection with Queequeg (Chapter 72) serves as material proof of the "mortal inter-indebtedness" (MD, 392) which all men (even Ahab) must recognize. Both of these instances function as physical manifestations of intellectual or spiritual truths, and they thus illustrate the relationship between Ishmael's sea voyage and his intellectual and spiritual voyage. Ishmael seems to be aware of certain human truths at the beginning of the novel, but some of these ideas, particularly his belief in man's epistemological limitations, have not been proven through a series of life experiences. Thus, although the squeezing of the sperm (Chapter 94) makes Ishmael temporarily forget all about his "horrible oath" and fills him with "the very milk and sperm of kindness," it is not until the voyage is over, after Moby Dick has been sought and lost, after Ishmael has been set adrift alone at sea on his friend's coffin, after "many prolonged, repeated experiences" (MD, 349) that Ishmael, on retelling the incident of the sperm squeezing in retrospect, can conclude "that in all cases man must eventually lower, or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity; . . . " It is only after he has done a sufficient amount of learning in life that he is able to end his quest, and, like Babbalanja, remain content with human love. Thus, once he has learned to shift his conceit of attainable felicity from the intellect and fancy to "the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the





fire-side, and country," he can conclude that, having "perceived all this, I am ready to squeeze case eternally" (MD, 349). This learning process reflects the balanced individual's greatest strength -- namely, his ability to view life with what Newton Arvin has called "the Double Vision; the vision, so to say, of the equatorial line from which one may look out on both North and South with equal comprehensiveness; the balanced vision of the sun itself as it enters the constellation of Libra or the Scales."<sup>7</sup> This double vision allows Ishmael to see Moby Dick as both the source of much havoc and the source of much good, as opposed to Ahab who can only identify the whale with "all evil." And it is because of this basic difference between them that Ahab is ultimately destroyed and Ishmael survives to explain the lesson that he has learned.

It is of note that Ishmael's first important lesson in the novel is his appreciation of human love through his friendship with Queequeg; and his last important conclusion, after his personal quest is over, is that one must be content with the amenities which we associate with human love. Also of note is the fact that Ishmael's life is saved by the coffin of the man who is responsible for rekindling Ishmael's feelings of fraternity with his fellow man. Thus, Ishmael's relationship with Queequeg is extremely important for a proper understanding of the novel and it seems highly unfair to Moby-Dick to suggest, as Murray Krieger does, that we "play down the significance of . . . [Ishmael's] relations with Queequeg and of other suggestions of a transcendent grace which moves within him, . . . ."<sup>8</sup> Krieger's



purpose is to show that Ishmael is "fundamentally without a commitment." However, as I have shown, Ishmael's commitment to humanity (which begins and ends with his reliance on Queequeg) is very strong. And it is because of this commitment that Ishmael learns to view life with a "balanced eye" (or a "Double Vision"). Consequently, Ishmael is saved at the end of the novel, not, as Krieger suggests, "because of his unique noncommitment," but because of his truly vital human commitment.

Babbalanja and Ishmael are Melville's main examples of what I have called the balanced individual. In brief, this type is characterized by an equilibrium of a developed heart and a developed mind (and the stress in each case should be on "developed"); he has learned to keep one foot on land and one in the sea of meditation. Ishmael, for example, is an intellectual quester, but his quest leads him to the realization that his powers are limited. Thus, he concludes that it is useless for man to try to "enlarge" his mind; his only recourse is to "subtilize it" (MD, 280). But he can arrive at this conclusion only because his thirst for the unknowable has been curbed by a concurrent subtilization of his heart. Were it not for Ishmael's link with the land and with humanity through love, he would have become imprisoned like Bulkington in an unending and deadly pursuit of "the ungraspable phantom of life." Thus, the balanced individual is the product of both emotional and intellectual experiences, as opposed to the unsaved quester, who is either driven to follow only the mind (e.g., Ahab) or only the heart (e.g., Pierre).<sup>9</sup> The isolato, on the



other hand, sins at the opposite extreme. He suffers an inner unbalance, not because of an overly strong drive to pursue the truth, but because his drive is not strong enough. For although some of the isolatoes are not always deficient in matters of the heart, all of them are guilty of not completely exploring their human potential at the intellectual and spiritual level. As a result, they lack a total awareness of their possibilities as men.

Basically, then, the isolato is a non-quester. As is evidenced by Babbalanja and Ishmael, man must be a quester to the extent that he must verify his ideas and beliefs in the world's testing arena; if his experiences show that his original ideas and beliefs were wrong, then he must be prepared to change them. But the isolato is unwilling to undertake this sort of intellectual or spiritual risk. Rather, he responds to life by adhering to one of three alternatives, depending on how strongly he feels his own link with humanity: he creates for himself his own truth, he denies the validity of human action, or he suffers a spiritual death and someone else's truth is imposed on him. But whichever category he belongs to, the isolato's weakness is such that he will cling to his particular alternative to the bitter end. Thus, the isolato's will becomes imprisoned because it lacks the strength to pursue and test a truth that might turn out to be false, and it therefore restricts itself within the limits of a fabricated truth, a denial of action, or an unthinking servility.

The three alternatives noted above distinguish the three general categories of isolatoes I will consider. In the first category





I include the character defined by faith and the character defined by complacent geniality. The alternative followed by the characters in the second category reflects the main tendency of the defeated characters. And the third category includes those characters who are displayed as objects. As we move from the first of these categories down, there is a general decline in the characters' feelings of association with humanity, which is accompanied by a corresponding weakening of the will. The characters of faith and geniality do not have the strength to go in search of truth, but because they do have fairly strong ties with humanity, they have the capacity for adhering strongly to man-made spiritual or social truths. The defeated characters, on the other hand, lack these human ties, and, as a result, they can only respond to spiritual adversity by denying the validity of human existence. And, at an even lower remove, we find the object characters, whose spiritual death renders them incapable of any meaningful act of will. The function of the isolato's will thus ranges over a wide spectrum. At the top of the scale, it serves as an inadequate life preserver -- a creator of temporary or artificial truths and a justifier of human existence -- and, as a result, it is given a fair amount of freedom. With the defeated individuals it can choose to die. At the very bottom of the scale it loses all life and the individual can only exist as a physical essence at the mercy of other men's wills. In all cases the relative freedom of the will is conditioned by the individual's sense of community with mankind and the spiritual awareness of his duties as a man which this sense of community gives him.





### CHAPTER III

The characters of faith and of complacent geniality are the most admirable of Melville's isolatoes, but they suffer from the basic weakness of all the isolatoes, i.e., they are incapable of testing themselves to see how close they can come to absolute truths. Instead, they rely very heavily on the land and the security which their community with mankind gives them; and they are too easily satisfied with conventional or man-made truths because these "truths" offer them something which they consider to be solid and unchanging. In other words, they seek a sense of human security which even Melville's questers are occasionally tempted to embrace. For example, when Pierre considers how his mother might react to his discovery of Isabel, he is momentarily tempted to seek shelter in mortal truth ("illusions"):

Fain, then, for one moment, would he have recalled the thousand sweet illusions of Life; though purchased at the price of Life's Truth; so that once more he might not feel himself driven out an infant Ishmael into the desert, with no maternal Hagar to accompany and comfort him.

(Pierre, 125)

Of course Pierre opts for "Life's Truth," but the non-questers prefer the "sweet illusion of Life," the mortal answers to life's mysteries. The character of faith explains life in terms of conventional religious



or superstitious beliefs, and the character of geniality faces life with a complacent attitude which allows him to rationalize evil away instead of accepting it. Thus, both types do exercise their wills in so far as it is necessary to create answers which will maintain their sense of security. They do not possess the Promethean strength to actually set their wills adrift in the limitless ocean, but their wills do enjoy a relative amount of freedom within the limits of their need for security.

The foremost example of this "free" will is Hunilla, the Chola Widow.<sup>1</sup> She ranks first among Melville's isolatoes because she is forced by chance to become totally isolated from humanity, and yet she is able to create a truth -- her own truth, but a truth nonetheless -- out of her isolation. She is shipwrecked on an island, she sees her two closest loved ones -- her brother and her husband -- drown before her very eyes, and she completely loses track of time so that she is uncertain if she will ever be rescued. But even though she is so totally isolated in space and time, as well as being cut off from the strength of her loved ones, she realizes that uncertainty can only lead to madness. Thus, she arbitrarily establishes, through an act of will, her own truth concerning her eventual deliverance from the island, and she relies on her Catholic faith to further substantiate this truth:

'The ship sails this day, to-day,' at last said Hunilla to herself; 'This gives me certain time to stand on; without certainty I go mad. In loose ignorance I have hoped and hoped; now in firm knowledge I will but wait. Now I live and no longer



perish in bewilderings. Holy Virgin, aid me!  
Thou wilt waft back the ship.

(PT, 94)

Hunilla manifests a certain amount of human strength in being able to cling to her faith and in creating a truth in the face of adversity; however, her truth is not based on reality but on her idea of how reality should be. She lacks the added strength to accept the possible limitations of her truth, and she rivets herself adamantly to an unflinching pursuit of her faith. A great deal of the narrator's authorial comments indicate that Hunilla's stubbornness in her chosen life style is not wise if one considers the reality of the human condition (as the narrator sees it). He points out, for example, that man's fate is always affected by chance: "in all things man sows upon the wind, which bloweth just there whither it listeth; for ill or good, man cannot know" (PT, 93). And the narrator also makes it clear that there is no communication between God and man so that Hunilla's clinging to her faith is futile since her "heart of earthly yearning" will only be "frozen by the frost which falleth from the sky" (PT, 101). Thus, even the narrator's praise of Hunilla's human strength (which is the highest praise for any single character in all of The Piazza Tales) is filled with irony:

As mariners, tost in tempest on some desolate  
ledge, patch them a boat out of the remnants of  
their vessel's wreck, and launch it in the self-  
same waves, see here Hunilla, this lone ship-  
wrecked soul, out of treachery invoking trust.  
Humanity, thou strong thing, I worship thee, not  
in the laureled victor, but in this vanquished one.

(PT, 94)





The mariners are certainly brave in once more attacking the waves, but they are self-destructive in attempting this by clinging to the remnants of a wreck. And this is exactly what Hunilla does in clinging to the remnants of her religious belief. Hunilla's self-created "certainty" depended on her faith that the Virgin would "waft back the ship" to her. After she is completely cut off from humanity by the deaths of Felipe and Truxill -- when she herself is left on a "desolate ledge" -- she destroys herself by proudly embracing this faith as if it were the Ultimate Truth. She does not accept what the narrator says about chance, for instance. She would not have agreed with Ishmael's concept of the "Loom of Time" (MD, Chapter 47). Instead, she is resolute in her belief that if she holds to an idea, it will come true. Also, she obviously refuses to believe that the heavens will always turn a deaf ear to her. And so she stubbornly clings to her faith and clasps her little brass crucifix, which becomes "worn featureless, like an ancient graven knocker long plied in vain" (PT, 99).

This last image suggests once more the ironical tone of the narrator toward Hunilla. For, although he can praise the human strength of "this vanquished one," he nonetheless makes it clear that her strength is focused in the wrong direction. Thus, in the final scene, we see Hunilla riding upon a small gray ass, symbol of her stubborn straightforwardness; "and before her on the ass's shoulders, she eyed the jointed workings of the beast's armorial cross" (PT, 101). The unknowable deity has been worn off her crucifix, and she now silently follows a featureless metal cross. Thus, in the same way that Ahab's





"free" will imprisons him as the "Fates' lieutenant" in search of an ungraspable truth, Hunilla's desire for security is shown to shackle her to a man-made truth she refuses to doubt. In this way, the will that was originally her strength becomes imprisoned within the walls of her self-established faith.

In Moby-Dick, Starbuck's character involves basically the same problems, with the difference that Starbuck's opposition to Ahab in the novel gives more dramatic evidence of the inadequacy of the character of faith when confronted with a serious spiritual dilemma. We begin to see signs of this inadequacy in the imagery of death which is used to describe him:

His pure tight skin was an excellent fit; and closely wrapped up in it, and embalmed with inner health and strength, like a revived Egyptian, this Starbuck seemed prepared to endure for long ages to come, and to endure always, as now; for be it Polar snow or torrid sun, like a patent chronometer, his interior vitality was warranted to do well in all climates.

(MD, 103)

On a physical level his endurance is greatly to be admired; however, this initial description is rather ambiguous. Starbuck possesses an "inner health and strength," but this health and strength is "embalmed" within him. Starbuck is a man of "interior vitality," but at the same time he is compared to "a revived Egyptian." These images of death and m<sup>w</sup>umification clash with the rest of the description so that we are led from the very beginning to suspect that whatever vitality Starbuck may have, it is too well protected from the rest of the world and too



deeply entombed within his outer shell for it to be of any use to him or his fellow man. His vitality is in fact isolated within his mummy-like skin in the same way that Hunilla is isolated on Norfolk Isle. And because of this isolation, which is outwardly represented by his lonely sailor's life, he seeks security in a self-made superstitious belief:

Yet, for all this hardy sobriety and fortitude, there were certain qualities in him which at times affected, and in some cases seemed well nigh to overbalance all the rest. Uncommonly conscientious for a seaman, and endued with a deep natural reverence, the wild watery loneliness of his life did therefore strongly incline him to superstition; but to that sort of superstition, which in some organizations seems rather to spring, somehow, from intelligence than from ignorance.

(MD, 103)

This last statement suggests that Starbuck's superstition represents a fabricated religious system, i.e., a system which springs from an intellectual desire to explain life as opposed to the superstition of the ignorant, who simply believe out of custom and habit. It must be noted here that Starbuck is basically a Christian; however, this reference to his superstition indicates that his Christian faith is not of the purest sort. Like Hunilla, he tends to use his Christian faith in such a way that it is useful to him in adding strength to his personal vision of life. In "The Gilder," for example, Starbuck consciously uses his faith to avoid a knowledge of evil: "Loneliness unfathomable, as ever lover saw in his young bride's eye! -- Tell me not of thy teeth-tiered sharks, and thy kidnapping cannibal ways. Let faith oust



fact; let fancy oust memory; I look deep down and do believe" (MD, 406). The parallel sentence structure in the last sentence suggests that Melville may be identifying Starbuck's "faith" with "fancy" and in this way stressing the fact that Starbuck uses his Christian faith for his own purposes (and thus changes it) rather than accepting it in its pure form. For further evidence of this, it is noteworthy that the "loneliness unfathomable" leads Starbuck to make an act of faith in the same way that "the wild watery loneliness of his life" (in the passage quoted above) inclines Starbuck "to superstition." In both instances, Starbuck's sense of loneliness leads him to make an act of will. It would seem, then, that just as the stranded Hunilla used her Catholic faith to help her create a truth which would safeguard her sense of security, so is Starbuck also driven by his loneliness to use his Christian faith in such a way that it insures his own tranquility. In short, Starbuck is incapable of confronting adversity head-on, and therefore he has set up a shield of superstitious belief which protects his isolated soul from the knowledge of evil in the same way that his mummy-like skin wards off the corrosiveness of physical death. But although his body's skin seems to be effective in protecting his body, his fabricated (and therefore unnatural) skin of superstition cannot stand up against violent spiritual storms:

And brave as he might be, it was that sort of bravery, chiefly visible in some intrepid men, which, while generally abiding firm in the conflict with seas, or winds, or whales, or any of the ordinary irrational horrors of the world, yet cannot withstand those more terrific, because more spiritual terrors, which





sometimes menace you from the concentrating brow  
of an enraged and mighty man.

(MD, 104)

It is in his confrontation with Ahab that Starbuck's weakness is most apparent. Ahab represents the quester whose individual will is free to dive as deep as the ocean floor in search of truth; by contrast, Starbuck is the land lover who binds his will within the limits of superstitious justifications. It is hardly a fair match between the two, and Starbuck realizes this. On the night following the quarter-deck scene in which Ahab successfully and with ease converts his crew to his personal quest for Moby Dick, Starbuck admits his weakness to himself. And it is particularly relevant here that the imagery which Starbuck uses reflects quite strongly his own passivity and helplessness when confronted with Ahab. He compares himself first to a ship which has been overpowered by Ahab -- "My soul is more than matched; she's overmanned; and by a madman" -- and then to a battlefield on which Ahab has been victorious -- "Insufferable sting, that sanity should ground arms on such a field! But he drilled deep down, and blasted all my reason out of me." Starbuck's will appears to be almost dead; he is at the mercy of his heart, and his heart is completely in Ahab's hands. Thus he compares himself to a ship in tow and to an unwound clock:

I think I see his impious end; but feel that I must  
help him to it. Will I, nill I, the ineffable thing  
has tied me to him; tows me with a cable I have no  
knife to cut. . . . I would up heart, were it not like  
lead. But my whole clock's run down; my heart the





all-controlling weight, I have no key to lift again.

(MD, 148)

Starbuck's weakness is represented by his knife-less and key-less situation. Lacking the will to act, he also lacks the tools with which to fight. Thus, he can only hope that perhaps the whale will not be found and "God may wedge aside" Ahab's "heaven insulting purpose."

But it is not completely fair to Starbuck to suggest that his will is close to being dead. Compared to Ahab, most men's wills would seem lifeless. After all, Starbuck is the only man on board who openly opposes Ahab, and he is also the only man capable of temporarily reawakening Ahab's "humanities" (Pip appeals more to Ahab's madness than to his "humanities"). However, it is wholly accurate to say that Starbuck's will is limited. And its limits are established by his self-created superstitious faith. As we have seen, the purpose of faith for this type of character is not that it serve as a form of adoration, but, rather, that it justify life or, to put it differently, that it protect the individual from the knowledge of a triumphant evil. This is made quite evident by Starbuck toward the end of the novel when, while staring into the depths of the sea, he quite consciously requests that he not be shown the "teeth-tiered sharks" and the "kidnapping cannibal ways" of the sea (MD, 406). This decision to believe only in the good is very much like Hunilla's unjustifiable belief that the ship left harbor on a specific day. Both prefer to ignore reality, or, in Hunilla's case, to make reality



conform to the individual's wishes, in order to make life more bearable. It is for this reason that Starbuck is able to accept Ahab's hegemony over him even though he realizes that Ahab's "fiery life" will end in "one little heap of ashes" (MD, 412) and that his crew will necessarily join him in this fate.

This is the tragedy and the paradox of Starbuck's situation. Because of his own weakness, he has committed himself wholly to a faith which chooses not to see evil. But it is this very faith which binds his will and which does not allow him to oppose Ahab so as to save the lives of the crew members. (Note that he is incapable of killing Ahab when he has the opportunity -- MD, Chapter 123.) Thus, his limited will is a sign of his isolation from humanity, and his inaction is itself an act of faithlessness to his fellow man, a faithlessness which is later paralleled by a disobedience to the very God in whom he sought strength:

'Against the wind he now steers for the open jaw,'  
murmured Starbuck to himself, as he coiled the  
new-hauled main-brace upon the rail. 'God keep us,  
but already my bones feel damp within me, and from  
the inside wet my flesh. I misdoubt me that I  
disobey my God in obeying him!'

(MD, 461)

Again Starbuck fully sees his weakness, but as soon as Ahab orders him to help him up the mast so that he can watch for Moby Dick, Starbuck does not hesitate in obeying: "straightway Starbuck did Ahab's bidding, and once more Ahab swung on high" (MD, 461).



Starbuck had analyzed his situation correctly after the quarter-deck scene: "Oh! I plainly see my miserable office, -- to obey, rebelling; and worse yet, to hate with touch of pity!" (MD, 148). Because his soul is m<sup>m</sup>umified and isolated within him, he is only partly alive. Like Prufrock, he is an "attendant lord," capable of starting a scene or two but never really coming to the point of decision and action. His ability to act has been limited by his conscious desire not to see the "teeth-tiered sharks" and the "kidnapping cannibal ways" of life. As a result, the orders of a strong spirit such as Ahab's can make Starbuck disobey his God. But at the same time his faith is his only strength. And although his inevitable death in the jaws of Moby Dick seems to suggest to him that life is sad as well as joyful, that a lifetime of "bursting prayers" and "life-long fidelities" can end as tragically as a lifetime of pride and defiance, he nonetheless turns to the "sweet powers of air" and to God and asks that they hug him and stand by him in his final hour (MD, 467). Thus, like Hunilla, he ends his life within the limits of his self-established faith.

The characters of complacent geniality also seek to maintain a sense of security. But although they also at times rely on a faith of sorts, these individuals avoid evil mainly by making use of what Kingsley Widmer has called a "benevolent rationalism."<sup>2</sup> In other words, they are mainly characterized by a flexibility of the mind which allows them to deny the importance of evil by ignoring it, or by finding a rational justification for it, or by blaming it on some





superhuman force. Thus, when it is useful to them, we sometimes see some of the men of geniality making use of a religious faith to help explain evil; while, at other times, they forget about this same faith if it is no longer convenient for them. In a superficial way, then, they exhibit a greater versatility than their faithful counterparts. But this does not necessarily reflect a greater freedom of will. The character of faith is at least able to decide what he wants to believe in a particular situation, but the man of geniality finds it very difficult to make decisions when he is faced with serious moral or spiritual crises. Rather, he confronts the world with a genial laugh and, because of his shallow spiritual hue, he is able to change colors like a chameleon whenever it best suits his purposes. Because his main concern is to preserve his laugh and his serenity, his will is not really strong, but flexible. It makes no significant decisions, but it is capable of accepting almost anything. As a result, the man of geniality's will is limited by the particular situation in which he finds himself rather than by an inner belief or moral code.

In short, the man of geniality is an individual who keeps a safe distance from life's more serious aspects. This noncommitment allows him to avoid over-involvement with evil and he can thus preserve his genial laugh by remaining isolated within his own complacency. It is noteworthy, for instance, that he is never a married man, and his bachelorhood is often made a key part of his characterization. One example of such a convivial but insensitive bachelor is the



highly-successful captain of The Bachelor (MD, Chapter 115), who revels in his wealth of sperm oil and refuses to believe that Moby Dick even exists. Also of note are the "affable" Templars in "The Paradise of Bachelors and The Tartarus of Maids," whose meeting place is described as a spot of isolation from the world: ". . . quite sequestered from the old city's surrounding din; and everything about the place being kept in most bachelor-like particularity, no part of London offers to a quiet wight so agreeable a refuge" (PT, 187). We find other references to this type of insensitive bachelor throughout Melville's works, but the most developed are Stubb and particularly Bartleby's employer and Amasa Delano, captain of The Bachelor's Delight. Stubb is the least sophisticated of the men of geniality I will consider. He does not create justifications for life's darker side very often; instead, he prefers to remain in a state of spiritual stupor: "Think not, is my eleventh commandment; and sleep when you can, is my twelfth" (MD, 114), he admits in a soliloquy. Thus, he is highly insensitive, not only to spiritual dilemmas, but also to physical threats. And he can be completely "happy-go-lucky" about even the most dangerous of situations, "taking perils as they came with an indifferent air; and while engaged in the most imminent crisis of the chase, toiling away, calm and collected as a journeyman joiner engaged for the year" (MD, 105). As a result of this apparent indifference to the seriousness of life, he reacts to all mortal tragedies with a laugh.

Ishmael explains that the cause of Stubb's "almost impious



good-humor . . . must have been his pipe" (MD, 105). As we learn later when Ahab tosses his own pipe overboard, Melville seems to identify pipe smoking with "sereneness" (MD, 114). Thus, in Stubb's case also, the pipe is a symbol of an attitude or a state of mind which ensures mental tranquillity:

I say this continual smoking must have been one cause, at least, of his peculiar disposition; for every one knows that this earthly air, whether ashore or afloat, is terribly infected with the nameless miseries of the numberless mortals who have died exhaling it; and as in time of the cholera, some people go about with a camphorated handkerchief to their mouths; so, likewise, against all mortal tribulations, Stubb's tobacco smoke might have operated as a sort of disinfecting agent.

(MD, 106)

Stubb's pipe is in effect a physical extension of his mental disposition to rationalize away all evil. And his most common means of doing this (when he can not simply ignore the evil) is to blame it all on an inevitable providence; in this way he divorces himself from having to make any moral decisions. Because of this, Stubb is the most complacent of the men of geniality, and he differs from the others in that he need not rely on religious answers outside of his belief in predestination. Thus, he can meet both good and evil with a laugh because as far as he is concerned there is nothing he can possibly do to change things: ". . . a laugh's the wisest, easiest answer to all that's queer; and come what will, one comfort's always left -- that unfailing comfort is, it's all predestinated" (MD, 149).





It is this sort of rationalization which allows the man of geniality to accept almost anything. And this is why, as I said before, he is limited by particular situations; for, if he accepts the situation, he will naturally do as the situation dictates rather than attempting to change it. In effect, he becomes a kind of slave. We can notice this, for example, in Stubb's actions as second mate. He never questions orders, but always does as he is told. He is very much like a machine; and, in fact, Ahab makes this very observation when he sees Stubb making a joke over Ahab's wrecked boat after the first day's chase: "What soulless thing is this that laughs before a wreck? Man, man! did I not know thee brave as fearless fire (and as mechanical) I could swear thou wert a poltroon" (MD, 452). These same words are echoed in "The Chase--Second Day" when Ahab, mustering up his crew's will to fight, asks them if they feel brave. Stubb immediately answers, "As fearless fire," and Ahab mutters to himself, "And as mechanical" (MD, 459). Ahab thus reminds us that there are two sides to Stubb. He is physically brave, just as Starbuck is physically brave, but his bravery results from a very unthinking, machine-like insensitivity to the perils of life. As a result, he does not feel threatened by life's greatest peril -- death -- because he simply refuses to think about it. As Ishmael tells us,

. . . if he ever did chance to cast his mind that way after a comfortable dinner, no doubt, like a good sailor, he took it to be a sort of call of the watch to tumble aloft, and bestir themselves there, about something which he would find out when he obeyed the order, and not sooner.

(MD, 105)





We can notice this same conscious desire to limit one's personal view of life in Amasa Delano and the lawyer-narrator of "Bartleby the Scrivener." Both of these men are put in situations where evil is very evidently present in one form or another, and like Stubb, they are perfectly capable of seeing evil; yet, their complacent geniality leads them to ignore it or to justify it in a variety of ways. This desire to retain their sense of security by avoiding what is unpleasant thus constrains their wills to function only within the limits of their geniality.

Amasa Delano is described as a man "of a singularly undistrustful good-nature, not liable, except on extraordinary and repeated incentives, and hardly then, to indulge in personal alarms, any way involving the imputation of malign evil in man" (PT, 256). His presence on board Don Benito's ship becomes the perfect testing ground for this "undistrustful good-nature;" for the strange happenings on the San Dominick tempt him with so many doubts about the ship and its captain that he is forced to make any number of assumptions so as to safeguard the validity of his genial social attitude. Particularly worthy of suspicion are the Spaniard's secret talks with Babo on the deck, followed by Don Benito's interrogation of Captain Delano with regard to the American's ship, the number of its crew, its armaments, etc. However, Captain Delano is able to justify everything that he sees, and there is "scarce any suspicion or uneasiness, however apparently reasonable at the time, which . . . [is] not . . . with equally apparent reason, dismissed" (PT, 286-87). When such



justifications are not available, Delano finds it quite easy to ignore the more unpleasant aspects of the ship. Of note is the incident in which two blacks violently dash one of the white sailors to the deck. When Delano brings this to Don Benito's attention, the latter is seized by a violent cough, which immediately causes Babo to come to his master's aid. Delano's glance is thus "called away from the spectacle of disorder to the more pleasing one before him" (PT, 288). And he apparently disregards the former spectacle altogether, for he then makes an offer to buy Don Benito's faithful servant.

An important part of Delano's geniality is his strong domestic quality; and this quality seems to be linked to the idea of an American man of leisure. Melville insists on the point by referring to Delano as "the American" throughout the story. Delano is said to be "a man of such native simplicity as to be incapable of satire or irony" (PT, 278). He seems to be "an eminently safe man" like Bartleby's employer. Of note is the reference to Delano's household boat: ". . . that boat, Rover by name, which, though now in strange seas, had often pressed the beach of Captain Delano's home, and brought to its threshold for repairs, had familiarly lain there, as a Newfoundland dog; . . ." (PT, 297). It is the sight of Rover which evokes in him "a thousand trustful associations" (PT, 297) and which permits him to overcome his flickering suspicions. Similarly, he allows the arrival of Rover later in the story (PT, 300) to interrupt his deliberations on the obvious inconsistencies aboard the San Dominick. Thus, Delano uses the solid memory of home and hearth to counteract the evil he



suspects.

This domestic complacency is merely an indication of a general intellectual smugness, which, in turn, reflects a reluctance on Delano's part <sup>to</sup> ~~of~~ committing himself or <sup>to</sup> ~~of~~ making a choice. For example, when Rover arrives with the fresh water, Delano seems to forget all the misdeeds that he had seen on board the San Dominick; and, when he is asked to dole out the water, he does so in a manner typical of the American way: "He complied, with republican impartiality as to this republican element, which always seeks one level, serving the oldest white no better than the youngest black; . . . ." (PT 301-302). Similarly, his love of Negroes, which is said to stem from their "great gift of good-humor" and their "docility arising from the unaspiring contentment of a limited mind," suggests that he loves them, not so much because they are happy, but because, like "Newfoundland dogs" (PT, 307), they pose no threat to his ideology. This intellectual complacency is best illustrated by the final scene of the story, where the discussion between Don Benito and Delano points to the basic differences between the defeated character and the man of geniality. As we shall see in the next chapter, the former tends to become overinvolved with the thought of the evil he has seen. Whereas Delano sins at the other extreme by not becoming involved enough. Thus, Delano says that he sees no reason to "moralize" upon the experience they have had. Rather, as is typical of him, he turns to the more pleasant aspects of nature: "see yon bright sun has forgotten it all," he says to Don Benito, "and the blue sea, and blue sky; these







have turned over new leaves" (PT, 352). This image of turning "over new leaves" could well apply to Delano himself -- he also (like nature) retains his "brightness" (his geniality), but he must constantly produce new rationalizations and justifications in order to do so.

Of note in this regard are Delano's religious assumptions, assumptions very similar to those made by the lawyer in "Bartleby the Scrivener." On one occasion, for example, Delano dispels his fears by ingenuously assuming that only the bad suffer pain or injustice: "Who would murder Amasa Delano? His conscience is clean. There is some one above" (PT, 298). And this reliance on a benevolent Providence is again seen later in the story following a particularly uncomfortable period of harboring "superstitious suspicions" and "reasonable fears" (PT, 323). But the narrator had already pointed out that Delano's nature was extremely "benign" when he was "at ease with respect to exterior things" (PT, 307). Thus, it is no surprise that he allows the various sights of his ship and Rover anchored next to the San Dominick, the blacks working industriously, and particularly "the benign aspect of nature, taking her innocent repose in the evening" to once more dispel his justified suspicions:

. . . as charmed eye and ear took in all these, with the chained figure of the black, clenched jaw and hand relaxed. Once again he smiled at the phantoms which had mocked him, and felt something like a tinge of remorse, that, by harboring them even for a moment, he should, by implication, have betrayed an atheist doubt of the ever-watchful Providence above.

(PT, 324)



It is ironic that we are never told what Amasa Delano thought of this "ever-watchful Providence" after he found out that his life had indeed been in danger. The revelations at the end of the story show very clearly that Delano was wrong in believing that no one would want to murder him simply because "his conscience is clean" and "there is some one above." However, such inconsistencies do not seem to bother the man of geniality. We can notice this in the series of assumptions which Bartleby's lawyer makes, for example. Like Delano, he is also faced with an evil, with the difference that the lawyer sees the evil early in the story and spends the rest of the time trying to find a "safe" way of dealing with it. Ironically, it is the lawyer's sense of community with his fellow man which forces him to come to grips with Bartleby's problem. This occurs on the Sunday morning when he finds Bartleby alone in the law office:

For the first time in my life a feeling of overpowering stinging melancholy seized me. Before I had never experienced aught but a not unpleasing sadness. The bond of a common humanity now drew me irresistibly to gloom. A fraternal melancholy! For both I and Bartleby were sons of Adam.

("BC," 23)

As a result of this sense of human fraternity, the lawyer feels impelled to understand Bartleby's situation and his actions because he realizes that, in so far as we are all, like Adam, fallen men, we share a sad fate. But the true horror of this fallen condition is in being alone with it, in solitarily brooding on its unresolvable mystery. Thus, the lawyer contrasts the gaiety of society -- "the bright silks



and sparkling faces . . . in gala trim, swan-like sailing down the Mississippi to Broadway" -- "with the pallid copyist" (PT, 23), and he is forced to recognize the existence of misery in the world. His preference, however, is for the safer "happiness" of Broadway.

It is important to note that the narrator is quite capable of correctly perceiving the lonely individual's fate in this world: "The scrivener's pale form appeared to me laid out, among uncaring strangers, in its shivering winding-sheet" (PT, 23), he says. But, writing in retrospect, he chooses to dismiss "these sad fancyings" as "chimeras, doubtless, of a sick and silly brain" (PT, 23). This time lag between the telling of the story and the actual experience of the emotions described allows the narrator a safe position from which to defend his "prudential feeling" (PT, 24): "My first emotions had been those of pure melancholy and sincerest pity; but just in proportion as the forlornness of Bartleby grew and grew to my imagination, did that same melancholy merge into fear, that pity into repulsion." In other words, the lawyer is able to feel pity for Bartleby only as long as he does not have to completely identify with Bartleby's position. But once it occurs to him that he also might be totally alone, he is struck with fear and desires to remove from his sight the reminder of such a horrible possibility. His rationale for rejecting Bartleby is thus aimed at denying, or at least counterbalancing, his feelings. Quite simply, his reasoning is that our affections can only go so far. Once they come upon a "hopelessness of remedying excessive and organic ill" (a wall, as it were), they are no longer valid and, indeed, should





be suppressed. In the narrator's words,

when at last it is perceived that such pity cannot lead to effectual succor, common sense bids the soul be rid of it. What I saw that morning persuaded me that the scrivener was the victim of innate and incurable disorder. I might give alms to his body; but his body did not pain him; it was his soul that suffered, and his soul I could not reach.

(PT, 25)

Here we can see the man of geniality's versatile mind at work. His first reaction is to feel attracted to his fellow man and to pity him in his suffering. However, when he begins to see that in being sons of Adam, he and Bartleby might share the same suffering, and when he sees that this suffering is incurable, his mind puts a stop on his emotions and he tries to cut himself off from Bartleby. But this is not completely possible; for, in the same way that the man of faith's will is shackled within the limits of his faith, the man of geniality's will is confined to rationalizations and acts of sociality. For this reason the lawyer finds it very difficult to force Bartleby to leave his office. When he asks him to do so and Bartleby refuses, the lawyer can only respond by benevolently assuming that the scrivener has a perfectly human reason for acting as he does:

. . . upon the occasion in question, I strove to drown my exasperated feelings towards the scrivener by benevolently construing his conduct. Poor fellow, poor fellow! thought I, he don't mean anything; and besides, he has seen hard times, and ought to be indulged.

(PT, 34-35)





He even goes so far as to create a sort of supernatural justification for not evicting Bartleby. In effect, he makes an act of faith. He assumes that his troubles "touching the scrivener, had been all predestinated from eternity, and Bartleby was billeted upon me for some mysterious purpose of an all-wise Providence, which it was not for a mere mortal like me to fathom" (PT, 35). Like Stubb and Delano, he explains the unexplainable by calling up powers which he can not control. In this way, he avoids having to act; and, by an agile twist of his mind, he can happily accept his distasteful situation by reasoning that he is performing a special pre-ordained mission for the gods:

At last I see it, I feel it; I penetrate to the predestinated purpose of my life. I am content. Others may have loftier parts to enact; but my mission in this world, Bartleby, is to furnish you with office-room for such period as you may see fit to remain.

(PT, 35)

But it is noteworthy that these fatalistic justifications are not long-lived. The lawyer is a man of geniality, not a man of faith, and as a result his sociality will always predominate over any religious beliefs he may have. Thus, it is to be expected that the "wise and blessed frame of mind" which his religious assumptions give him is soon disturbed by "the unsolicited and uncharitable remarks obtruded upon . . . [him] by . . . his professional friends who visited the rooms" (PT, 36). Similarly, after the lawyer has abandoned Bartleby and has



refused to acknowledge any responsibility for him, he claims to feel "a charitable prompting to call at the place and see poor Bartleby." Yet, he says, "a certain squeamishness, of I know not what, withheld me" (PT, 39). It is quite likely that this "squeamishness" is a fear of social disapproval, for it is only when he sees that the social pressure is being reversed -- when he begins to feel the fear "of being exposed in the papers" (PT, 40) -- that he seeks Bartleby again. Thus, the lawyer's belief in predestination is only momentary, merely one of the many darts in the man of geniality's quiver of rationalisms, to be used or rejected as the situation requires.

The only unchanging part of the man of geniality's character is his genial mind, which, like the character of faith's religious belief, is both his strength and his prison. For although it allows him to serenely rationalize evil, it confines his will in such a way that it becomes obsessed with good. For example, even when Stubb is about to meet death in the jaws of Moby Dick, his mind rejects the terrible truth and he cries "cherries! cherries! cherries! Oh, Flask, for one red cherry ere we die!" (MD, 467). It seems absurd to be crying for cherries when one is about to be annihilated, but this is typical of the genial character's way of thinking. Even though Stubb can recognize what is going to happen, his mind runs its accustomed course and sprinkles a few tasty cherries on a disastrous situation.



#### CHAPTER IV

The second general category of isolatoes consists of Benito Cereno and Bartleby, the characters I have referred to as defeated individuals.<sup>1</sup> It might be argued that both of these men have a greater spiritual awareness than the other characters discussed in so far as Cereno and Bartleby actually confront evil whereas the characters of faith and of geniality merely find means of avoiding evil. It seems quite clear that Don Benito (and probably Bartleby also) has gained a true appreciation of the nature of evil as a result of his experiences. However, the way in which both of these characters react to evil suggests that their spiritual awareness is limited to a consciousness of only this negative aspect of life, much as Ahab is preoccupied with the "dark Hindoo half of nature," for example. But, as is evidenced by the balanced individual, Melville's concept of a truly human spiritual awareness involves a "Double Vision," i.e., a capacity for seeing both the good and the bad as Ishmael eventually does. And Ishmael achieves this Double Vision only after he has re-established his ties with mankind through his love for Queequeg. Thus, the individual's ability to love is the crucial factor in leading him to a state of inner balance through his sense of connection with humanity. For this reason I have considered it useful to distinguish the isolatoes according to their relative ability to love and to feel bound to the human community. Thus, although there is no doubt that Bartleby





and Cereno are much more interesting and profound individuals than, say, Stubb, I have placed them here because they demonstrate how the individual can lose his ability to love his fellow man. Both characters reject humanity and die in total isolation.

We can compare the defeated individual's state of mind to Ishmael's anti-social tendencies in the beginning of Moby-Dick. Ishmael goes through a suicidal stage, during which he views his going to sea as a substitute for pistol and ball. But once he is exposed to human love through his friendship with Queequeg, he rejects his misanthropic feelings, and it is from this point in the novel that his voyage loses its suicidal aspect and becomes an intellectual quest. Without his connection with humanity through love, Ishmael would never have learned to view his earthly doubts and heavenly intuitions with an "equal eye" (MD, 314). But Benito Cereno and Bartleby lose their human connections and, as a result, they become trapped at the suicidal stage.

Benito Cereno is the more complex of the defeated individuals because we can actually see him going through two different spiritual stages. In the first of these stages he is not yet a defeated individual, and he does show a strong attachment to his fellow man. Of note is his grief for Aranda, his "murdered, unburied friend" (PT, 328); he had merely to mention his name and his air became "heart-broken; his knees shook; his servant supported him" (PT, 275). Also, we learn from Benito Cereno's deposition and his "cordial conversations" (PT, 350) with Delano that Don Benito's actions on board the San Dominick



were far from egotistical. Because of the blacks' murderous threats, Don Benito continuously endeavored "not to omit any means to preserve the lives of the remaining whites" (PT, 340). And he admits to Delano that he was able to effect an escape from the San Dominick only because of his feelings of friendship for the American captain:

'Ah, my dear friend,' Don Benito once said, 'at those very times when you thought me so morose and ungrateful, nay, when, as you now admit, you have thought me plotting your murder, at those very times my heart was frozen; I could not look at you, thinking of what, both on board this ship and your own, hung, from other hands, over my kind benefactor. And as God lives, Don Amasa, I know not whether desire for my own safety alone could have nerved me to that leap into your boat, had it not been for the thought that, did you, unenlightened, return to your ship, you, my best friend, with all who might be with you, stolen upon, that night, in your hammocks, would never in this world have wakened again. . . .'

(PT, 350)

However, although these feelings of friendship are apparently quite authentic, they become secondary to the deadly influence of the blacks on Don Benito, an influence which in effect kills his will to live. The death-like character of the blacks is suggested throughout the story, and, as we learn in Don Benito's deposition, they control the Spaniard's actions by a daily reminder of Aranda's skeleton (the new figure-head of the ship), and they command him to "keep faith with the blacks from here to Senegal, or you shall in spirit, as now in body, follow your leader" (PT, 339). Don Benito is in effect tyrannized by an ominous and ever-present fear of death, and his deposition shows that freedom of will is impossible under these circumstances.



For example, the court document records Don Benito's story of Babo's plan to capture the American ship, and then adds "that to prevent this project the deponent was powerless; . . ." (PT, 344). Don Benito's testimony also points out that Hermenegildo Gandix had made some attempts to convey hints of the true state of affairs to Delano, but that "these attempts were ineffectual owing to fear of incurring death . . ." (PT, 347). And, toward the end of the deposition, Don Benito stresses "that these statements are made to show the court that from the beginning to the end of the revolt, it was impossible for the deponent and his men to act otherwise than they did; . . ." (PT, 347-348). Similarly, during his conversations with Delano, Don Benito repeated "again and again . . . how hard it had been to enact the part forced on . . . [him] by Babo" (PT, 350). It is because of having to act contrary to his own will because of the fear of death that Don Benito becomes "broken in body and mind" and decides not to "return home to Chile, but [to] betake himself to the monastery on Mount Agonia" (PT, 349).

This decision marks the downfall of Don Benito as a human being. He now turns away from his fellow man and he condemns himself to a solitary death in the monastery. There is an indication earlier in the story (during the sea passage back to Lima) that this decision is arrived at consciously: ". . . midway on the passage, the ill-fated Spaniard, relaxed from constraint, showed some signs of regaining health with free will; yet, agreeably to his own foreboding, shortly before arriving at Lima, he relapsed, finally becoming so reduced as





to be carried ashore in arms" (PT, 333). The phrases "ill-fated Spaniard" and "agreeably to his own foreboding" suggest that Don Benito has lost his will to live and that he is now convinced that it is his fate to suffer an unhappy death. We can find further evidence of this in what he says to Delano towards the end of the story:

'God charmed your life, but you saved mine. To think of some things you did -- those smilings and chattings, rash pointings and gesturings. For less than these, they slew my mate, Raneds; but you had the Prince of Heaven's safe conduct through all these ambuscades.'

(PT, 351)

The implication here is that Don Benito does not have "the Prince of Heaven's safe conduct," and, as a result, he falls into a state of despair. He is no longer the Don Benito who was willing to sacrifice himself in order to save the lives of others. He has become a defeated individual. Of note is his final conversation with Delano. It is no longer like the "cordial conversations" which marked the trip back to Lima, and it shows that Don Benito has undergone a spiritual change. As is the case with Ahab, the encounter with evil has had a gradual effect on him so that by the end of the story, Don Benito has become preoccupied with evil and with the tragedy of human incommunicability. Thus, when Delano points out that the past should be forgotten, that the sun, the sea, and the sky have all "turned over new leaves," Don Benito answers that they can do so only "because they have no memory. . . . because they are not human'" (PT, 352). However, Don Benito's



definition of what is human has become distorted, as is evidenced by the fact that he ceases to function as a human being. At first he had the welfare of others in mind, and he could respond to evil by acting; but now he seems to think of no one but himself and he is incapable of action.

The difference between Don Benito the man and Don Benito the defeated individual can be illustrated by comparing him at his two stages to Ishmael and Pip when they are stranded at sea. Pip goes mad because he can confront the uncharitable vastness only in terms of his own solitary self; the confrontation thus drives him to a preoccupation with his own "awful lonesomeness," which is defined as "the intense concentration of self in the middle of such a heartless immensity" (MD, 347). Ishmael, on the other hand, can cling to his sense of connection to humanity (symbolized by his friend's life-saving coffin) and he does not go mad, but he lives on to continue learning from life and to retell his story. Similarly, Don Benito does not fall into despair as long as he feels in touch with humanity and his actions are directed towards preserving the lives of others; but once he allows his preoccupation with evil to work within him, he loses both his human contact and his will to live. His acceptance of this defeat, then, is his last act of will as a human being. From the moment that he becomes reduced to the state that he must be carried off the ship to the time of his death, Don Benito is no longer a complete man, but a defeated individual in isolation from his humanity. As a result, he can no longer make acts of will and he can only wait for death.



In Bartleby's case we can notice a similar degeneration of will power resulting from human isolation. From the beginning of the story it appears that Bartleby is quite capable of making acts of will. For example, he answers the lawyer's advertisement for the job in his office and he repeatedly refuses to do anything besides copying. Eventually, he refuses to do even that. His will seems quite strong, for in all of these instances his decisions are always "irreversible" (PT, 15). In fact, it is his "cadaverously gentlemanly nonchalance," his ability to be "firm and self-possessed" (PT, 21), and his "austere reserve" (PT, 24) which awe the lawyer into a "tame compliance with his eccentricities." Bartleby seems to be absolutely certain about what he prefers (the lawyer points out that he is "a man of preferences"), and it is this certainty which gives him his strange power over the lawyer. However, it is of note that his certainty is completely negative. He does not desire to have anything or to do anything positive. He only prefers not to act, not to communicate, not to live. Of note, for example, is the scene outside the lawyer's office after Bartleby has been evicted by the new landlord. The narrator suggests several jobs that Bartleby might do, but the scrivener rejects them all. And, interestingly enough, he ends each of his refusals by stating that he is "not particular" or that he "would prefer to be doing something else," thus suggesting that he might want to do something. But none of the jobs the lawyer suggests are appealing to him, and the interchange finally reaches its climax when Bartleby states that there is nothing "definite" about being a traveling companion (the





lawyer's last suggestion). "I like to be stationary," he says, "but I am not particular" (PT, 41). His constant repetition of this last phrase suggests that Bartleby is incapable of making a choice about anything which involves positive action. The narrator could continue to suggest different jobs and Bartleby would simply continue to answer, "No, I would prefer not to do that. But I am not particular." Bartleby prefers to remain "stationary" in his unswerving negation of human action; thus, he is not particular about any single job because all action is equally futile to his mind, and he can just as easily prefer not to do one as well as another. Consequently, his will is quite limited, for it can only deny everything while accepting nothing.

It is significant that the last job the lawyer suggests -- "going as a companion to Europe, to entertain some young gentleman with your conversation" -- is the most socially oriented of the jobs. And it is precisely to this job that Bartleby answers with his longest speech, stressing that there is nothing "definite" about such work. If we consider this answer in the light of what we learn in the sequel about Bartleby's employment in the Dead Letter Office, we might be tempted to surmise that Bartleby's experience with the dead letters has convinced him of the inadequacy or indefiniteness of human communication. It is difficult to say that this is definitely so, given the narrative technique of the story. But the important fact to notice is that, whatever the reason, Bartleby is not interested in human companionship. It is significant that the conversation ends with the lawyer inviting Bartleby to his home. And Bartleby responds with practically



the same words that he used at the beginning of the dialogue: "No: at present I would prefer not to make any change at all" (PT, 41). Thus, Bartleby's "stationary" state involves not only the denial of action but also the denial of human relationships. And, in fact, this latter denial -- Bartleby's isolation from the human community -- seems to be the source of his completely negative attitude towards life.

It is interesting in this respect that the story is narrated by the convivial and sociable lawyer; for although he does have his shortcomings, he is the type of man who would be sensitive to a deficiency of sociality in others. Furthermore, he also proves to be quite sensitive to the problem of human isolation. When he discovers that Bartleby has been "keeping bachelor's hall all by himself" in the law office, the narrator's first reaction is one of shock at the "miserable friendlessness and loneliness" of the scrivener. For the first time in his life, he is seized by an "overpowering stinging melancholy" -- "a fraternal melancholy," he calls it, for he realizes that he and Bartleby share "a common humanity;" they are both "sons of Adam" (PT, 23). At this point in the story we see the lawyer at his most noble and most human level, and he manifests genuine empathy for the horrible loneliness he sees. Of course, being a man of geniality -- "an eminently safe man," dedicated to the "grand" points of "prudence" and "method" (PT, 4) -- he cannot allow his melancholy to blacken his spirits. A "prudential feeling" soon steals over him and he rationalizes that "to a sensitive being, pity is not seldom pain. And when at last it is perceived that such pity cannot lead to effectual succor,



common sense bids the soul be rid of it" (PT, 25). But the point is that the lawyer is capable of feeling genuine pity, and he does realize that it was Bartleby's "soul that suffered, and his soul I could not reach" (PT, 25). This brings us back to the problem of the inadequacy of human communication. The story could be seen as the presentation of two different reactions to this problem. Bartleby's reaction can be summarized by a phrase which is applied to Babo at the end of Benito Cereno -- ". . . since I cannot do deeds, I will not speak words" (PT, 352). Bartleby goes through various stages of denying actions until he finally remains silent also. He begins by copying, but he does so "silently, palely, mechanically" (PT, 12), which suggests that the work has no meaning or that he can find no meaning in it. At the same time, he exercises his will in refusing to do other work. Eventually, he stops copying, he persists in remaining in the office, and his dead-wall reveries increase. His "stationary" state of mind reaches the point where his ability to act diminishes. He cannot even state that he prefers to remain in the law office. Consequently, when he is arrested, he "offered not the slightest obstacle, but, in his pale, unmoving way, silently acquiesced" (PT, 42). And, during his imprisonment in the Tombs, he spends all of his time staring at the "dead wall" (PT, 44), and he becomes more and more silent. In fact, on the day of his death, one of the turnkeys refers to him as "the silent man" (PT, 45). Bartleby's story suggests that he has reacted to the indefiniteness of human acts (be they acts of communication or whatever) by adhering to the only "definite" thing he





could find -- namely, death. Consequently, he is incapable of seeing any validity in human action and his will is only able to deny life.

By contrast, the lawyer responds to the problem of incommunicability by protecting himself from death. As we have seen, he is quite capable of perceiving Bartleby's "common humanity." But he also realizes that Bartleby is too far gone, and thus he relies on his "common sense" to save him from becoming over-involved in feelings of melancholy. In essence, Bartleby creates a tension in the lawyer between his humanity and his desire to remain a "safe" man of geniality. The lawyer's humanity is awakened when he realizes that both he and Bartleby are sons of Adam. While his "safe" side convinces him that Bartleby is a hopeless case. But it is interesting that the lawyer's humanity continues to work within him even though he has realized that he cannot reach Bartleby's soul. Thus, he tries to talk to Bartleby, he invites him to his home, and he visits him in the Tombs. The experience with Bartleby seems to have at least partially revitalized the lawyer's sense of humanity. He continues to be a man of geniality for his own protection, but he nonetheless cannot help but feel sorry for Bartleby. He notes, for example, that Bartleby had "become a millstone to me, not only useless as a necklace, but afflictive to bear. Yet I was sorry for him" (PT, 29). And he feels impelled to retell Bartleby's story. This act in itself demonstrates his sense of connection to mankind, and it is thus of note that he ends the story with the exclamation, "Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!" (PT, 47).



The lawyer is thus useful as a point of comparison in judging Bartleby's sense of humanity; for, in rejecting the lawyer, Bartleby is also denying his connection with his fellow man. At one point in the story, for example, the lawyer and all the employees are behind Bartleby's screen, and Bartleby curtly suggests that they leave: "'I would prefer to be left alone here,' said Bartleby, as if offended at being mobbed in his privacy" (PT, 27). Whenever he works, Bartleby always remains "in his hermitage, oblivious to everything but his own peculiar business there" (PT, 16). And the lawyer also points out that Bartleby never voluntarily spoke, nor did he ever seek enlightenment from books or newspapers, but "would stand looking out, at his pale window behind the screen, upon the dead brick wall; . . ." (PT, 24). Thus, the lawyer seems acute in calling Bartleby "a bit of wreck in mid-Atlantic" (PT, 29). For, even if we concede that Bartleby might have had very noble motives for choosing the life style he has, it is clear that he has totally cut himself off from the land and from humanity. And, as a result of this isolation, he has become a "wreck." He is no longer capable of living or of making acts of will. Like Benito Cereno, he made his last act of will as a man when he decided to stop trying to live. From that point on he was a defeated individual, only capable of staring at death (the "dead" walls) and waiting for his body to join his soul in death.

Thus, the defeated individuals are men who are quite capable of comprehending evil. But they lose contact with their humanity; consequently, their experiences with evil lead them to see it only in



terms of themselves rather than in a larger sense, including all of humanity. Like Pip, they become preoccupied with "the intense concentration of self in the middle of such a heartless immensity,"<sup>2</sup> and they are defeated. Benito Cereno's experience with the blacks leaves him "broken in body and mind" and Bartleby's experiences turn him into "a bit of wreck in mid-Atlantic." Both men thus lose the ability to act, and each finishes out his existence in silence, waiting for death.





## CHAPTER V

The defeated individuals represent the last positive step in the descending scale of human self-awareness and spiritual weakness. "Positive" because they do not abdicate what spirituality they have; rather, they use it to consciously remove themselves from life. Bartleby's insistent "I would prefer not" is a constant reminder that he has made a choice between life and death, and Benito Cereno's decision to go into the monastery rather than return home indicates a similar decision. Thus, their will does function in so far as it can choose to stop functioning. But with the object characters we arrive at the zero mark on the isolato scale. These characters have absolutely no ability to make acts of will because they are totally devoid of all spirituality. Thus, their only identity is a physical and mechanical one. They are not men, but mere objects and tools to be used by an active will. For example, the renegade sailors imprisoned by Oberlus are described as individuals whose "previous lawless life . . . had dissolved within them the whole moral man, so that they were ready to concrete in the first offered mold of baseness now; rotted down from manhood by their hopeless misery on the isle; wonted to cringe in all things to their lord, himself the worst of slaves; these wretches were now become wholly corrupted to his hands" (PT, 108). Also of note are the lifeless girls in "The Tartarus of Maids," whose



cold, machine-like efficiency in the paper mill leads the narrator to note that they "did not so much seem accessory wheels to the general machinery as mere cogs to the wheels" (PT, 202).

This kind of imagery which stresses the sub-human quality of the object individual is especially prevalent in Moby-Dick, where we find the greatest concentration of this particular type among the Pequod's crew. First among these characters is Flask, the third mate. As is the case with Stubb, Flask is also insensitive to the mortal dangers of life, and this insensitivity is expressed in terms of his lack of fear during his encounters with whales:

So utterly lost was he to all sense of reverence for the many marvels of their majestic bulk and mystic ways; and so dead to anything like an apprehension of any possible danger from encountering them; that in his poor opinion, the wondrous whale was but a species of magnified mouse, or at least water-rat, requiring only a little circumvention and some small application of time and trouble in order to kill and boil.

(MD, 106)

Flask's bravado with whales is similar to Stubb's, but whereas Stubb's indifference to danger stems from his propensity to rationalize away evil, Flask's indifference results from an "ignorant, unconscious fearlessness" (MD, 106). He is the least human (and therefore the most spiritually isolated) among the mates because he is the least sensitive to human responsibilities. As a result, his characterization stresses his object-ness. He is numbered among the "wrought nails" of humanity who are "made to clinch tight and last long" (MD, 106). And on board he is called "King Post" because he resembles the short,



square timber which is used to protect Arctic whalers from the cold battering seas. These two images suggest that although he is strong and hardy, he is nonetheless nothing more than a useful tool. He is a lump of lifeless matter -- a sturdy piece of steel, a solid timber, or, as his name suggests, a container -- in every case he serves his purpose with unthinking efficiency.

In effect, all three of the mates are useful tools because all three have lost part of their humanity as a result of their spiritual isolation. As we have seen, Starbuck tries to avoid evil through his religious belief, Stubb through his attitude of genial rationalization, and Flask is simply too ignorant to be aware of the problem of evil. Thus, Melville follows the descending order of the ship's hierarchy and creates his own descending order of spiritual awareness.<sup>1</sup> After the three mates, most of the crew members are more or less at Flask's level of spiritual isolation.

The most singular of these isolatoes is the Pequod's carpenter. His character seems to be defined only in terms of the work which he does, a fact which stresses the servility of his nature. The carpenter is the general factotum of the ship. In fact, he is compared to

one of those unreasoning but still highly useful, multum in parvo, Sheffield contrivances, assuming the exterior -- though a little swelled -- of a common pocket knife; but containing, not only blades of various sizes, but also screw-drivers, cork-screws, tweezers, awls, pens, rulers, nail-filers, countersinkers. So, if his superiors wanted to use the carpenter for a screw-driver, all they had to do was to open that part of him, and the screw was fast: or if for tweezers, take him up by the legs, and there they were.





The reason for the carpenter's tool-like nature is his spiritual insensitivity. We learn that he is prepared to do all sorts of jobs, but he is "alike, indifferent and without respect in all. Teeth he accounted bits of ivory; heads he deemed but top-blocks; men themselves he lightly held for capstans" (MD, 388). His appreciation of the world is conditioned by the tools and materials with which he works so that he cannot see beyond the material nature which all things hold in common. Thus, he himself seems to be nothing more than one of the anonymous (note that we never learn his name) and unfeeling "things" which make up the vast and impersonal material world:

For nothing more was this man more remarkable, than for a certain impersonal stolidity as it were; impersonal, I say; for it so shaded off into the surrounding infinite of things, that it seemed one with the general stolidity discernible in the whole visible world; which while pauselessly active in uncounted modes, still eternally holds its peace, and ignores you, though you dig foundations for cathedrals.

(MD, 388)

This identification of the carpenter with the world of "things" underscores his isolation from the world of man. In fact, his loss of humanity seems to be so complete that he is compared to a mere number and a spiritually unaware babe: "He was a stript abstract: an unfractioned integral; uncompromised as a new-born babe; living without premeditated reference to this world or the next" (MD, 388). And he is pictured as an unthinking physical essence who can respond to life only on a purely physical level: "He was a pure manipulator; his brain, if he had ever had one, must have early oozed into the muscles



of his fingers" (MD, 388).

Ishmael tries to give a balanced picture of the carpenter by pointing out that, notwithstanding what has been said, he was "no mere machine of an automaton" (MD, 389). But he seemed to have within him an "unaccountable, cunning life-principle . . . [which] kept him a great part of the time soliloquizing." But this soliloquizing is only like the humming of "an unreasoning wheel" or like the mutterings of a sentry who kept himself awake in his sentry-box (the carpenter's body) by talking to himself. Thus, his soliloquizing, rather than revealing a true life-principle within him, indicates that the thinking and spiritually aware humanity which might have once been alive in him has been reduced to a state of mechanical self-awareness. And since he can only see himself as a servile and sub-human individual, his soliloquies reflect his acceptance of this limited self. For example, he gives up trying to understand the "queerness" of Ahab by admitting that "a short, little old body like me, should never undertake to wade out into deep waters with tall, heron-built captains; . . . " (MD, 392). Similarly, when he later soliloquizes on having to turn Queequeg's coffin into a life-buoy and complains that it is not the "clear, virgin, fair-and-square mathematical jobs" he likes to do, he seems to show an inkling of understanding and he appears to see evil and danger in the Pequod's journey -- "Cruppered with a coffin! Sailing about with a graveyard tray!" (MD, 431). However, he stresses his own insensitive invulnerability by comparing himself to a sturdy type of wood -- "But I'm made of knotty Aroostook hemlock; I don't budge"



(MD, 431) -- and he points once more to his own tool-like servility:

"We workers in woods make bridal-bedsteads and card-tables, as well as coffins and hearses. We work by the month, or by the job, or by the profit; not for us to ask the why and the wherefore of our work, . . ."

(MD, 431).<sup>2</sup>

There is no explanation of how the carpenter arrived at this machine-like state. But the important fact to note is that his attitude reflects an inner death which separates him from his humanity and encloses him within the world of things. The same is true of the other object men, and they are all described in language similar to what we have just seen. Perth, for example, is identified very closely with his work and his tools: "Silent, slow, and solemn; bowing over still further his chronically broken back, he toiled away, as if toil were life itself, and the heavy beating of his hammer the heavy beating of his heart" (MD, 400). During the quarter-deck scene Ahab refers to the crewmen as "the unrecking and unworshipping things, that live; and seek, and give no reasons for the torrid life they feel!" (MD, 144). In "The Candles" Ishmael compares them to "numbed wasps," "skeletons," and plants which are "rooted to the deck" (MD, 416). And toward the end of the novel, they are likened to plants that will "not sprout forth a single spear or leaf" (MD, 437-438), "machines . . . [that] dumbly moved about the deck" (MD, 438), and "timid prairie hares that scatter before the bounding bison" (MD, 454). This use of sub-human imagery culminates in "The Chase--Second Day," where the ship image divests the sailors of what individuality they had and reduces





them to the objects which make up Ahab's ship:

They were one man, not thirty. For as the one ship that held them all; though it was put together of all contrasting things -- oak, and maple, and pine wood; iron, and pitch, and hemp -- yet all these ran into each other in the one concrete hull, which shot on its way, both balanced and directed by the long central keel; even so, all the individualities of the crew, this man's valor, that man's fear; guilt and guiltlessness, all varieties were welded into oneness, and were all directed to that fatal goal which Ahab their one lord and keel did point to.

(MD, 454-456)

This last image gives us the clearest indication of the object characters' complete spiritual death. And it is ironic that their isolation from the common continent of men has led to their being absorbed into a sort of spiritless society, i.e., the ship. Like the maids in "The Tartarus of Maids," the sailors have become unified, but their unity is purely physical and mechanical. And it serves to accentuate their spiritual disunity. The truly alive individual, on the other hand, maintains his individuality and is therefore not absorbed into the ship. It is thus significant that Ishmael is cast away from the rest of the ship and is saved, not by a remnant of the Pequod, but by the coffin which had been made from lumber "cut from the aboriginal groves of the Lackaday islands" (MD, 396).



## CONCLUSION

Using the balanced individual as a standard, we can see that all of the isolatoes considered are, in varying degrees, human failures. It was noted in Chapter II that the main characteristic of the balanced individual is an equilibrium of a developed heart and a developed mind. These two aspects of development are very closely interrelated. However, it was suggested that the development of the heart is the more essential (or, at least, the more basic) of the two: first, because the lesson of human love gives the individual a sense of the importance of humanity and of the human struggle to survive at the peak of one's potential (e.g., Ishmael's love for Queequeg changes his stint on the Pequod from a pistol and ball voyage of isolation to a metaphysical quest); and secondly, because the sense of communion with mankind which is engendered by the lesson of love gives the individual a solid reason for living once he discovers the epistemological limits of the human mind (Ishmael learns to be content squeezing "case eternally," and even Ahab admits that to "look into a human eye...is better than to gaze into sea or sky; better than to gaze upon God" -- MD, 444).

All of the isolatoes are deficient in their intellectual development; however, they differ from one another in the extent to which they have undergone this more basic emotional development. And because of this difference between them, some are more capable



of approaching the standard of the balanced individual (at least with regards to a developed heart) than others. As we have seen, the balanced individual's ties with humanity allow him to undertake a fruitful metaphysical quest and then reconcile him to the truth to which this quest leads him. His human ties are therefore very important in giving his will the freedom to search for truth. The same is true of the isolatoes. Consequently, those that are closest to the balanced individual because of their stronger ties with humanity are more capable of exercising their minds, whereas those who are more cut off from the common continent of men are less able to make acts of will. Thus, Hunilla and Starbuck are able to create truths because they are the most emotionally developed (and therefore the most human) of the isolatoes, as is evidenced by their ability to love their families and their fellow man. The characters of geniality are at a lower level because their love for humanity is less profound and more egoistical. They are basically concerned with preserving their personal sense of comfort and security by embracing religious or mental truths which do not threaten their ideologies, and in this way they limit the function of their will by their complacency. At an even lower level we have the defeated individual, who suffers a greater isolation from the security of the land and its human ties. Consequently, he sees no purpose in life, and his will can only choose death. And at the very bottom of the isolato scale we find the object character, whose spiritual death reflects a separation not only from humanity but also from his personal individuality. Thus, his will is





nonfunctional and he exists on a merely physical level.

Melville's isolatoes thus demonstrate the relationship between man's sense of human brotherhood and his ability to make acts of will. Or, to put it more precisely, the isolatoes illustrate the connection between the individual's sense of self as a man and his ability to function as a human being. As is evidenced by the balanced individual, Melville clearly believed that man cannot be aware of his human responsibilities unless he first recognizes his relationship to the rest of humanity. For in recognizing his brotherhood with men, the individual also becomes aware of his own essence as a man who makes up part of that brotherhood. But, within the scale of isolatoes, Melville shows how a breakdown in man's sense of human brotherhood is accompanied by a deterioration in the individual's ability to function as a man. And it is for this reason that the will loses its vitality as we descend the scale of isolatoes from those who can love to those who are bereft of feelings of affection for their fellow man.



## FOOTNOTES

### Chapter I

<sup>1</sup>Quester is Stern's term in The Fine Hammered Steel. Bowen discusses the same character type in terms of "defiance" in The Long Encounter.

<sup>2</sup>Braswell, "Melville as a Critic of Emerson."

<sup>3</sup>Some of the more useful of these studies include: Matthiessen, American Renaissance; Oliver, "Melville's Picture of Emerson and Thoreau in The Confidence Man;" Vincent, The Trying Out of Moby Dick; Stern, The Fine Hammered Steel; Austin, "The Three-Stranded Allegory of Moby Dick;" Stern, "Moby-Dick, Millennial Attitudes and Politics;" and Hoffman, "The Anti-Transcendentalism of Moby Dick." An opposing view is presented by Cowan, who contends that Moby-Dick is not totally satirical of Transcendentalism, in his article, "In Praise of Self-Reliance: . . . ."

<sup>4</sup>The phrase is taken from Hawthorne's short story "Ethan Brand." Matthiessen and Vincent both make the connection between Melville and Hawthorne. Other discussions of this point can be found in: Arvin, Herman Melville; McCarthy, "The Extraordinary Man as Idealist in Novels by Hawthorne and Melville;" Gross, "Hawthorne versus Melville;" and, most notably, Miller, "Hawthorne and Melville: The Unpardonable Sin."

<sup>5</sup>Stern, The Fine Hammered Steel, 13.

<sup>6</sup>Moby-Dick, 108. All subsequent page references are made to the Norton Critical Edition and will follow the abbreviated formula in parentheses.

<sup>7</sup>Matthiessen, 447.

<sup>8</sup>Matthiessen, 448.



## Chapter II

<sup>1</sup>All subsequent references to Mardi will be made to the 1964 New York edition.

<sup>2</sup>Hawthorne, "Ethan Brand."

<sup>3</sup>All subsequent references to Pierre will be made to the Standard Edition of The Works of Herman Melville.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Yu, "Ishmael's Equal Eye: . . . ." Yu argues convincingly that Ishmael is the "narrator-hero" of Moby-Dick and that the novel is first and foremost concerned with "Ishmael's cultural quest."

<sup>5</sup>Arvin makes this same point in Herman Melville. Reprinted in Moby-Dick As Doubloon, 210.

<sup>6</sup>Yu makes a similar point in "Ishmael's Equal Eye: . . . ," 115-116.

<sup>7</sup>Moby-Dick As Doubloon, 225. Sedgwick discusses Ishmael's "spiritual balance" in The Tragedy of Mind, 125.

<sup>8</sup>Moby-Dick As Doubloon, 270-271.

<sup>9</sup>At the height of Pierre's decision to dedicate himself to the search for truth, he exclaims: "The heart! the heart! 'tis God's anointed; let me pursue the heart!" (Pierre, 127). Bowen points to the difference between Ahab and Pierre in this way: "tragedy comes to the first through the mind's increasing tyranny over the heart, to the second through the excesses of a generous but not yet disciplined heart" (The Long Encounter, 157).

## Chapter III

<sup>1</sup>Sketch Eighth. "Norfolk Isle and the Chola Widow," in "The Encantadas or Enchanted Isles." All page references to sections of The Piazza Tales are made to the New York edition and will follow the formula: (PT, 86).





<sup>2</sup>Widmer, The Ways of Nihilism, 7.

#### Chapter IV

<sup>1</sup>Vincent's "Symposium" on "Bartleby the Scrivener" contains a wide range of opinions on the story. The articles by Miller and Franklin both consider Bartleby and Benito Cereno as similar in that they both withdraw into themselves and away from the world.

<sup>2</sup>Arvin in "Symposium" argues that men are interdependent and forlorn, and Bartleby becomes mad because he accepts his forlornness as a final fact and forgets the fact of dependence.

#### Chapter V

<sup>1</sup>In discussing "The Doubloon," Matthiessen states that "Melville deliberately portrays in the three mates the graduated steps of decline from spiritual insight" (American Renaissance, 452). Gleason, in his "Moby Dick: Meditation for Democracy," also includes a dicussion of the differences between the three mates.

<sup>2</sup>Gleason points out that the carpenter is a human machine.



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